CHAPTER 6

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Two Public Works Challenges

Two major challenges face today's public works personnel. The first is the challenge of finding cost-effective solutions to increasingly complicated urban problems. The second is communicating effectively with the public, recognizing the public's increasingly elevated expectations relative to public facilities and services and the public's growing understanding of technology and the environment. A premise of this chapter is that many and varied stakeholders want to be involved in public works decisions and should be given the opportunity to do so.

In retrospect, there was great need for meaningful communication with stakeholders in the Skokie and Wilmette street storage projects. Two factors heightened the need for stakeholder involvement. First, the technology was very new, especially for Skokie. Second, many individuals, especially residents and business people scattered throughout the CSS, would be directly affected. These were not remote projects.

Interestingly, and fortunately, both Skokie and Wilmette recognized the need for intense communication. From the outset, both communities mounted proactive efforts to interact with stakeholders. These efforts apparently played a major role in the success of the two projects. As evidence of this, read the Chapter 8 summary of interviews and comments with Skokie and Wilmette officials.

Purpose of this Chapter

Given the apparent importance of stakeholder involvement in the two street storage projects described in this manual, the purpose of this chapter is to describe those efforts. This documentation may be helpful to other communities. While communities with a CSS should benefit from some of the specifics, many of the stakeholder involvement efforts in Skokie and Wilmette are applicable to a wide range of public works projects. Therefore, this chapter, unlike most other chapters of this manual, is not focused primarily on street storage systems.

A Characteristic of Wet Weather Problems: Widely Fluctuating Public Interest

The interest of the public and some elected and appointed government officials in wet weather problems and opportunities tends to fluctuate widely, as illustrated in Figure 6-1. The fluctuations parallel the random nature of major meteorologic events. Interest usually is most intense during and immediately after a destructive problematic water event such as basement or surface flooding, or CSOs.

Later, typically months later, when the initial studies/plans/preliminary engineering are completed and recommendations made, interest has subsided. The zeal that commissioned the investigations is not complemented with similar zeal to implement the recommendations of those investigations. Maintaining stakeholder interest is one challenge of a stakeholder involvement program.

The widely fluctuating interest associated with wet weather problems contrasts with a morel level and continuous concern with most other areas of public works and services. Examples are water supply pressure; condition of streets, especially presence of potholes; level of police protection; and quality of public schools. Once problems develop in these areas, they tend to persist and to receive persistent public attention until they are solved.

More on the Need for Stakeholder Involvement

A public works effort that fails to include a stakeholder involvement program plans to fail. Although said over a century ago, and in an entirely different context, the following words of President Abraham Lincoln are appropriate: “With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions” (Helweg, 1985).

Grigg (1986) defines planning as “studying what to do” and distinguishes planning from decision making or “deciding what to do.” The point is that studying and deciding are two different activities or processes, and, as exemplified by the preparation of a street storage plan, the studying and deciding processes are usually carried out by different groups. A team of professionals and technicians prepares the plan. Another group of primarily appointed and elected officials, usually influenced by the public, typically makes decisions based on the findings of the plan.

Because planning and deciding are different functions done by different groups, public works personnel and their consultants must not be so presumptuous as to think that their recommendations will be fully embraced by decision makers. The professionals can greatly enhance the probability of acceptance of the recommendations if the work is of high quality and if the professionals effectively communicate with all interested individuals and groups.

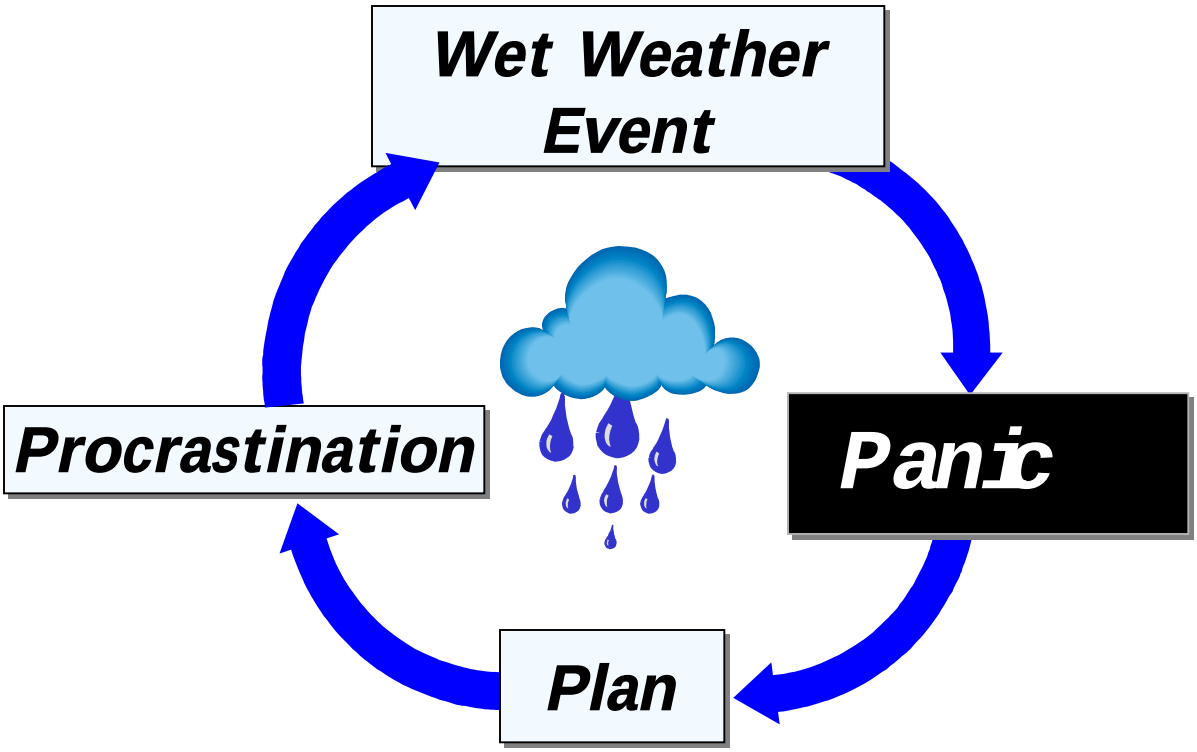


Figure 6-1. The “Hydroillogical” cycle

A public interaction program, or lack thereof, is often the principal reason for the successful implementation of a public works program or the failure to implement it. This observation is supported by the work of Kurz (1973) and Rubin and Carbajal-Quintas (1995) who describe six unsuccessful urban area planning efforts (not all water-related) and conclude why they were not implemented. Deficiencies identified include a lack of clearly presented objectives and standards; poor public involvement efforts; inadequate coordination between government units and agencies; and a myopic approach to the identification, development, and testing of alternatives. Kraft (1997) concludes that failure to build public consensus is the reason for the failure of several public projects that would have incorporated new ideas. Street storage is an example of a new idea. Kraft lists causative "common pitfalls" similar to the preceding deficiencies. Avoiding such deficiencies and pitfalls is the goal of a public interaction program, especially when new, innovative technology is contemplated.

Perry (1996) advocates the preceding ideas using a "pro and con" model of public communication. When the desirable "pro" approach is used, public works professionals are proactive, proficient, and pro-people. In the undesirable "con" mode, the situation is confrontational and confusing and messages are contrived.

Herrin and Whitlock (1992) somewhat harshly, but perhaps accurately, suggest that the cause of some communication failures lies with engineers', and perhaps other professionals', formal and informal education. According to them:

> *Engineers are taught very few skills in interpersonal relationships, much less those of public interface and involvement. We spend little, if any, time addressing it at our conferences and conventions. We then spend thousands of hours and millions of dollars defending our projects when threatened by delays and possible blockage by public intervention.*

As noted by Viessman (1989), public sector problems "cannot be solved in the technologic area only... Engineers must be society-wise as well as technology-wise."

Identification of Stakeholders

The success of a stakeholder involvement effort is determined more by the number of different, legitimate stakeholders involved then by the total number of individuals involved. Many subgroups with very different, often competing agendas typically constitute the stakeholders. Breadth of stakeholder representation and involvement is crucial as suggested by Figure 6-2.

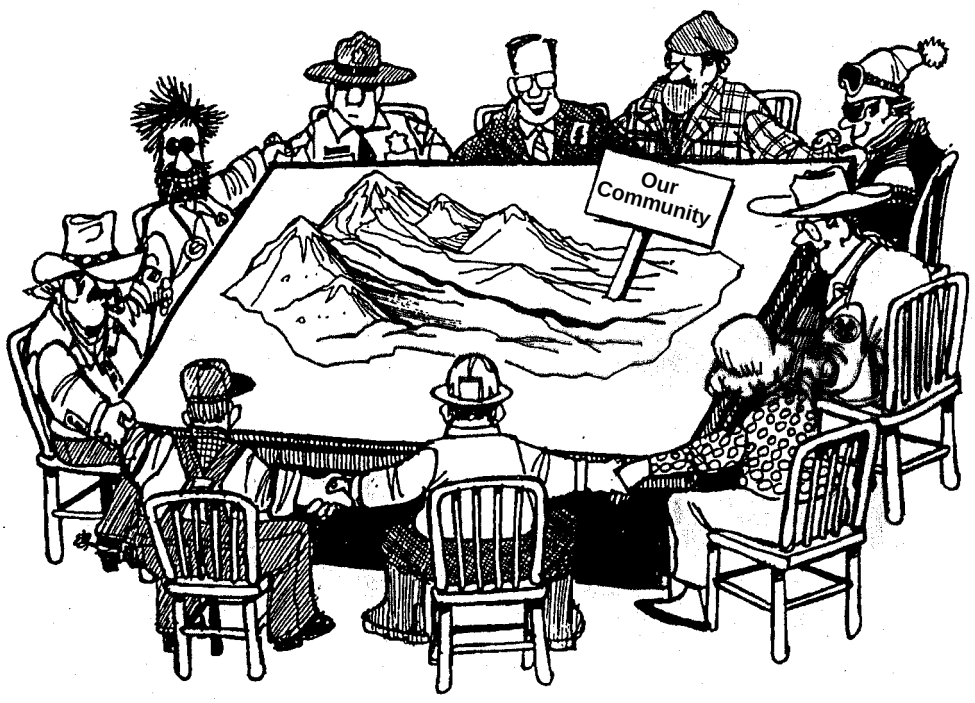


Figure 6-2. Breadth of stakeholder involvement is crucial (Source: USEPA, 1997).

Public works officials should be especially wary of the temptation to exclude what they regard as “extremist” elements from the deliberation process. These groups have a right to be part of the process and to express their views. Attempts to exclude them are likely to aggravate matters and precipitate or elevate conflict. In addition to affording them their rights, inclusion of “extremist” organizations may lead to moderation of their positions as their representatives are gradually exposed to data and information developed during the management program and as they interact with spokespersons for other segments of the public.

Presented in Figure 6-3 is a likely set of stakeholders for a street storage project. Note the breadth of interests that are represented.

Types of Stakeholder Involvement

Priscoli (1989) suggests that interaction between public works professionals and the public refers to a continuum of activities, programs, and techniques. The continuum ranges from proactive public involvement (e.g., public information, advisory groups, workshops) at one end of the spectrum to reactive conflict management (e.g., mediation, collaborative problem-solving, negotiation, and arbitration) at the other end. The preceding suggests that stakeholder involvement should employ many and varied programs and events.

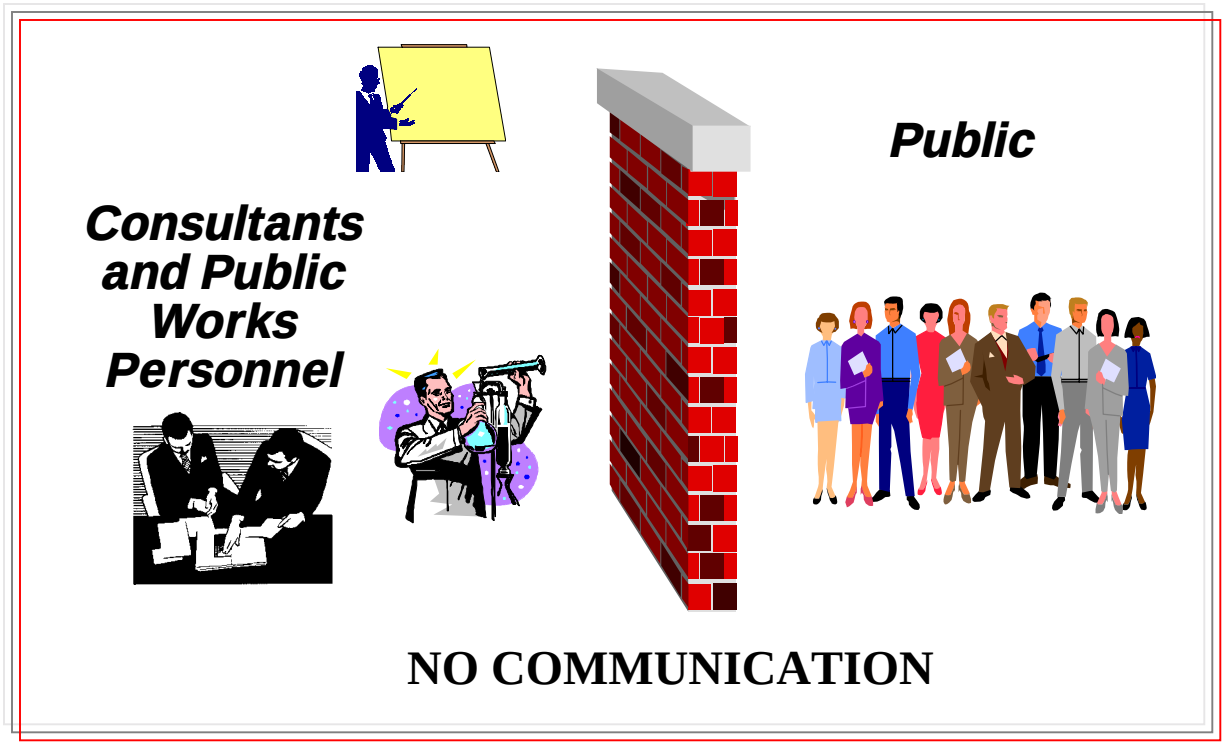
Unfortunately, some professionals with public works responsibilities fail to appreciate the importance of the communication challenge, or they recognize the challenge but are not prepared to meet it. The traditional DAD approach, that is, public works professionals adopt *a decide-announce-defend* mentality, is no longer appropriate. The much more progressive and inclusive POP approach, that is, *public owns project*, is more likely to be effective given the changing nature of the public’s expectations and knowledge (Walesh, 1999).

Speaking directly to civil engineers, and indirectly to all public project professionals, Wakeman (1997) describes today’s situation this way: “...broad sections of today’s public are concerned, vocal, and actively engaged in the formulation and implementation of public policy, particularly policies regarding public facility construction projects. Today’s civil engineer must be ready to work on infrastructure projects from many more perspectives than were required in earlier years.”

Furthermore, stakeholder involvement is explicitly intended to be an iterative, two-way process. The old DAD strategy is out. It is being replaced by the two-way POP strategy in which concerns, ideas, and information flow freely between water resource professionals and the individuals and organizations representing various interests. Public interaction goes way beyond no communication (Figure 6-4) and announcing decisions (Figure 6-4). Interaction even goes beyond public information (Figure 6-5),

1) Local, regional, state, and federal entities.

Figure 6 - 3. A street storage project is likely to have many stakeholders, all of whom should be involved from the outset.



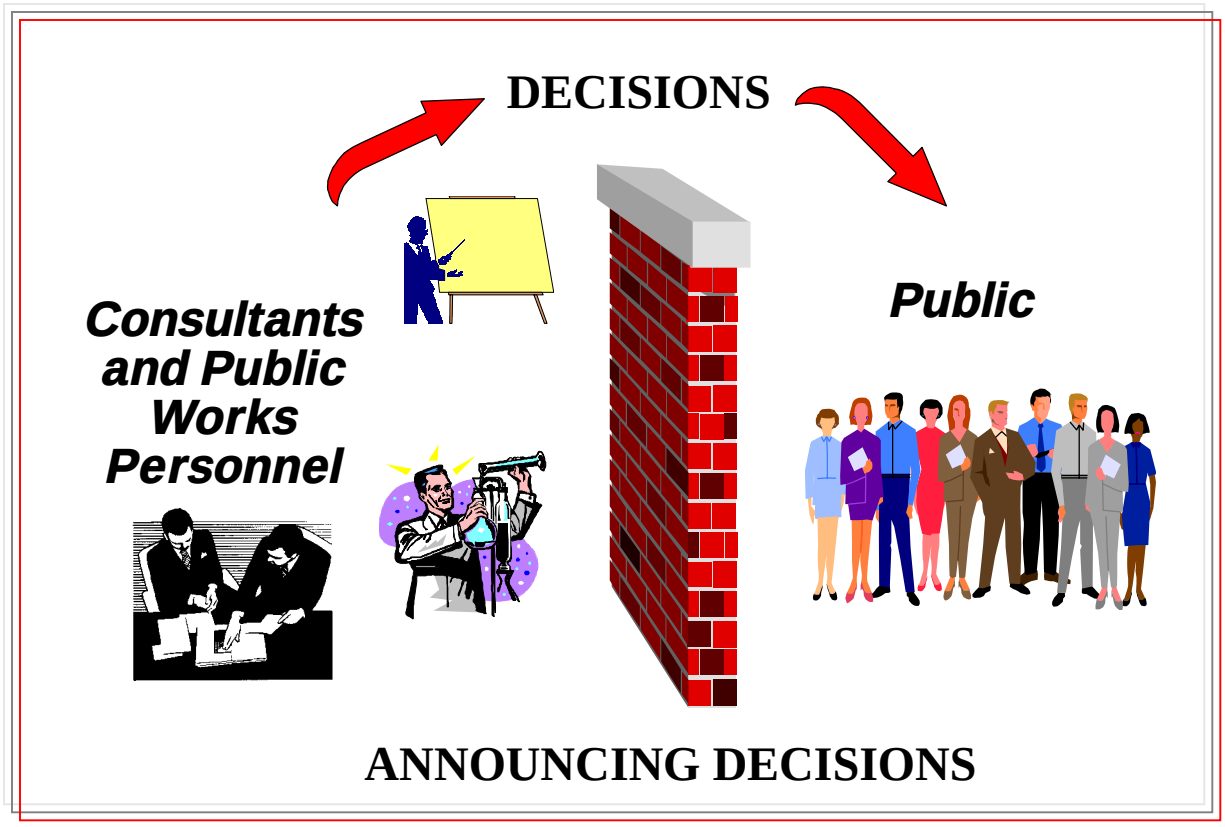
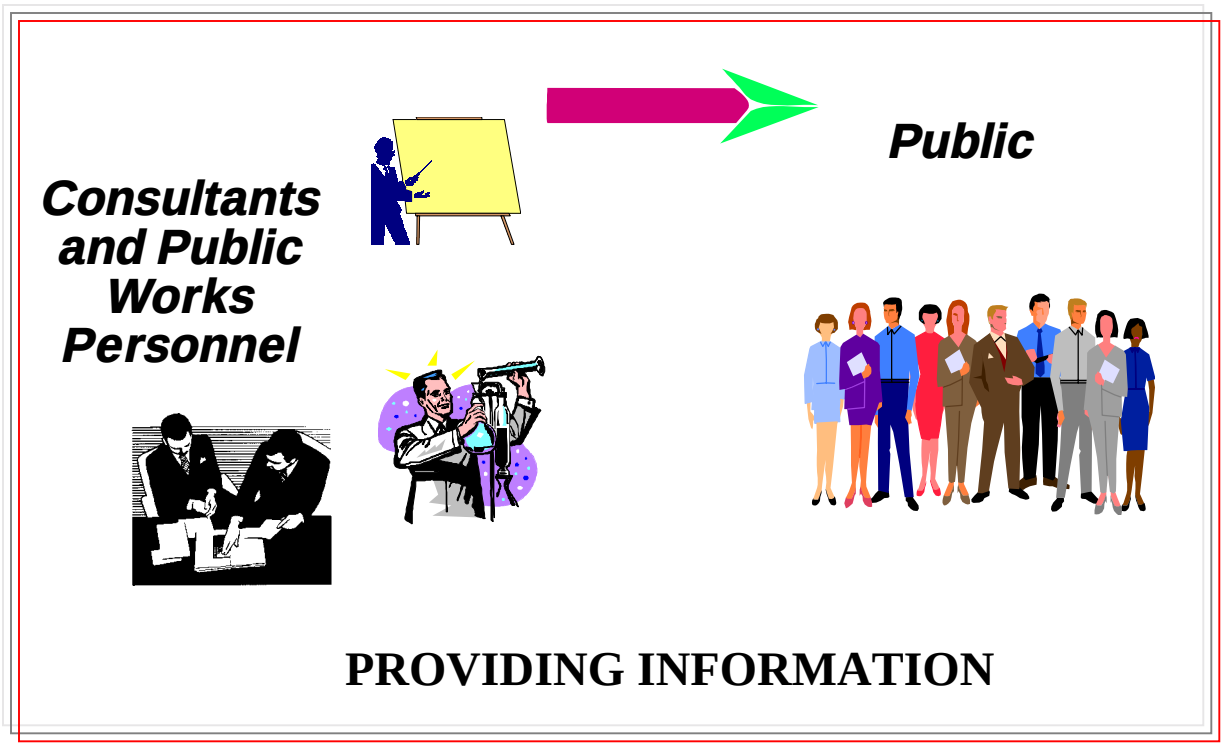


Figure 6-4. No communication and announcing decisions are increasingly unacceptable ways of serving the public.



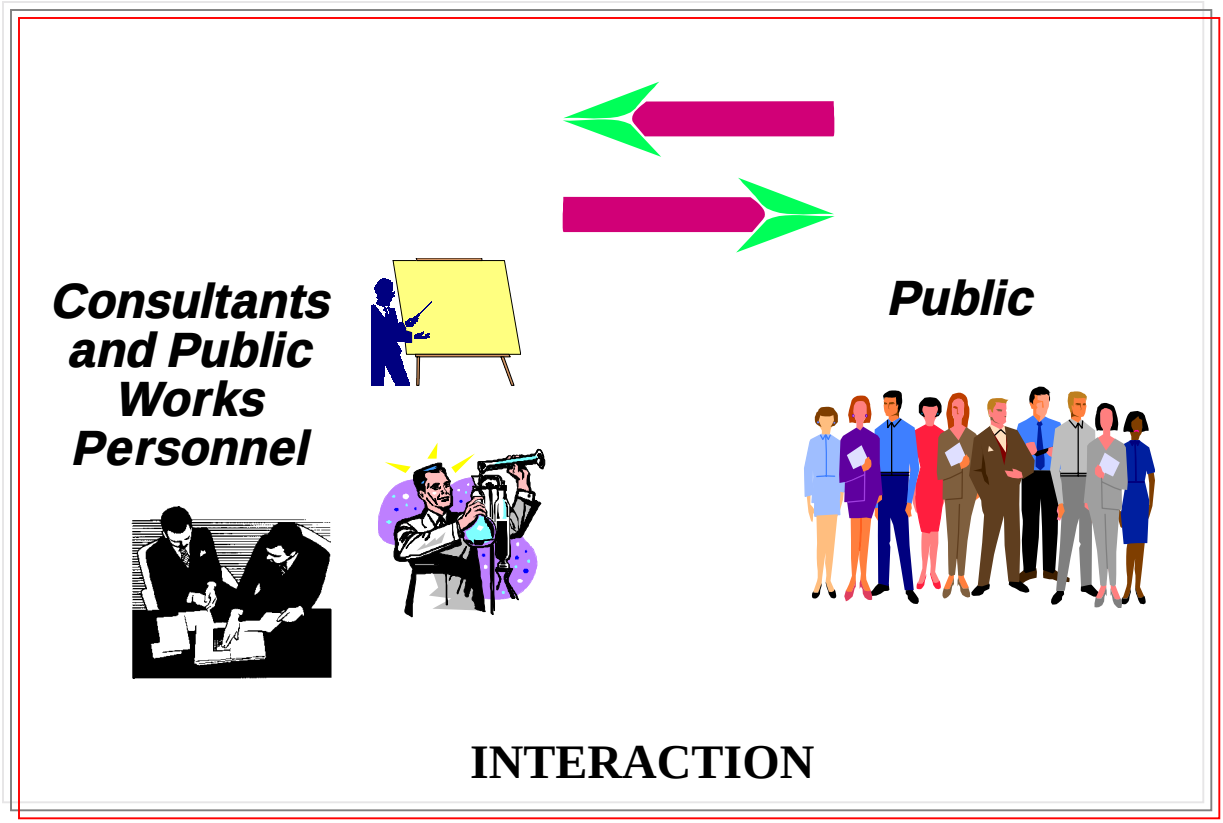


Figure 6-5. The goal in stakeholder involvement goes beyond providing information, it is meaningful interaction.

which implies one-way communication from water professionals to the public. Public interaction is truly two-way communication (Figure 6-5).

The importance of conducting the public interaction effort throughout a public works program—from beginning to end—must be emphasized. Astrack et al (1984), Rubin et al (1995) and Walesh (1993) emphasize the need to repeatedly interact with various elements of the public beginning on “Day 1" and extending throughout the process. In addition, the process should be highly visible to and easily accessible by the public. Sargent (1972) uses the term “fishbowl planning” to suggest frequent and open stakeholder involvement as the plan is being prepared.

The stakeholder paradigm presented in this chapter has three objectives (Walesh, 1989, 1993, 1999). They are:

- The first objective is to demonstrate to the stakeholders that the public works professionals are aware of the problems, at least in a general sense; want to learn more about them; and want to seek solutions. In other words, public works professionals need to demonstrate empathy and concern. The public’s position in the early part of a planning process might be represented by the anonymous statement, “I don’t care how much you know until I know how much you care.” Sometimes the most vociferous citizens need an opportunity to vent their frustration with public works problems and the apparent inability of responsible parties to solve those problems. As stated by P. S. Hale, “We earned the public’s distrust. We’ll have to work even harder to regain their trust” (Eschenbach and Eschenbach, 1996). The interaction process must provide opportunities to express frustration, to find empathy among the public works professionals, and, hopefully, to enable frustrated individuals to become positive participants in the problem defining and solving process.

- The second objective of a stakeholder involvement program is to gather supplemental data and information pertinent to the effort. Interested citizens and officials, if informed about what they believe to be a potentially useful public works effort, are likely to contribute photographs, information on problems, ideas on solutions and other useful data and information. Similarly, but on a larger scale and in a more formal manner, various government units and agencies are likely to offer potentially useful data, reports, funding opportunities and other information if they are informed about the effort, are invited to contribute, and believe they will benefit.

- The third and final objective of stakeholder involvement is to build a base of support for rapid plan implementation. Enlightened citizens and officials, who have been informed about a public works program and have been given an opportunity to participate in it, are likely to become supporters of the program, to help interpret it for others, and to otherwise help implement it. Worthy goals are to have stakeholders exhibit pride of authorship and a sense of ownership in the public works program.

Essential to the success of a public works effort is agreement between the public and the professionals on what problems are to be mitigated or prevented. As stated by Silberman (1977), "The objectives of a public participation program should be to assure that the planners and the public have the same understanding of what the problems are and that the proposed solutions are perceived as solutions by both the planners and the public." Concurrence on problem definition is not as simple as it may seem. For example, basement flooding in a CSS might be viewed as "the problem" by the public. In contrast, public works personnel might view such flooding as the "symptom" of the "real problem," namely, an inadequately sized CSS or localized constrictions in the system.

Examples of Stakeholder Involvement Techniques

Skokie and Wilmette Approaches

Skokie and Wilmette used, and continue to use, an effective mix of stakeholder involvement programs, events and supporting devices. Some of their strategies and tactics may be of value to other communities.

Both communities used the strategy of starting the stakeholder involvement effort at the beginning of the street storage projects, that is, when the projects were in the concept stage. Second, the stakeholder involvement process was and is being continued throughout the projects. A third shared strategy is that both communities used a variety of communication tactics.

Stakeholder involvement tactics used or being used in Skokie and Wilmette include:

- Articles in the community's newsletter—"Newskokie" in Skokie and the "Communicator" in Wilmette.

- Cable television programs.

- Surveys of residents. Wilmette had an excellent response on its survey of residents in the CSS.

- Letters to residents.

- Public meetings which were usually held at the Village Hall. In a spirit of outreach, Wilmette conducted some meetings in resident's homes.

- Use of a committee of senior personnel, such as Skokie's Flood Task Committee, to monitor and guide the engineering consultant's efforts (Walesh and Schoeffmann, 1984).

- Physical models, like an operating, table top device created under the Skokie project to illustrate surface and subsurface storage.

- Assigning one public works person to answer telephone inquiries.

- Special brochures

- Conduct of high visibility field pilot studies that included the construction of berms, so that citizens can drive over and experience them, and the temporary flooding of streets, so that citizens could observe the depth and lateral extent of ponding.

- Video taping, for subsequent informational use, construction of facilities, ponding on streets, and vehicles driving over berms (Walesh and Schoeffmann, 1984).

- Brief discussions of the evolving street storage system as part of new resident receptions. This approach was used in Wilmette.

Additional Tactics

Many and varied other tactics have been used for interacting with stakeholders. Ideas, in addition to those presented in the preceding section, are (Walesh, 1999):

- Presentations to service clubs and other community groups: Knowledgeable and influential community leaders are typically members of one or more civic organizations such as service clubs, environmental groups, and professional associations. Because of the frequency of their regular meetings—sometimes two or more times per month—these groups are often receptive to suggestions for speakers and programs. Such presentations can help to expand knowledge of and support for a water management effort.

- School programs: By educating school children about water issues, a two-fold result can be achieved. The students gain understanding and, to the extent they share what they learned with their parents, the knowledge is disseminated.

- Guided and self-guided tours: Interested individuals and groups, including

news people, can be provided with guided tours of a project area, such as a CSS. A single bus or van, preferably equipped with a public address system, should be used for a guided tour so that all participants can easily travel together and can be provided with an informative narrative between stops. Self-guided tours are also possible if a written tour guide is available. Guided and self-guided tours enhance understanding of the location and severity of wet weather problems. Well-meaning citizens often have strong opinions about environmental problems (e.g., combined sewer overflows) that they have never seen or experienced. Tours also provide an opportunity for the public works officials and their consultants to explain and show remedial and preventive measures that are under consideration in the planning program. Another benefit of guided tours is the spirit of camaraderie that typically develops and the new interpersonal relationships that often result.

- Briefings for newly-appointed or elected public officials: By being introduced to issues and being provided with basic information on proposed, on-going or completed public works projects, new public officials are more likely to be supportive (Gilbert et al, 1981). Tactics include inviting them to join advisory committees or to attend public meetings and providing them with special briefings.

- Preparation of media packages: Example contents are summaries of regulations; descriptions with photographs of problems; brief discussions, supplemented with photographs or graphics, of potential solutions; and experiences of other communities.

- Workshops: Public works officials and their consultants can conduct workshops for interested citizens and public officials. These events provide an opportunity for in-depth exploration of substantive topics such as issues, findings, alternatives, recommendations, funding, and operations.

- Electronic-based access and input: Email and websites (e.g., Tam and Murillo, 1997) offer exciting possibilities.

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